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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses current problems in the teaching of foreign languages, suggests reasons for its present decline, and proposes a program to be developed at the local level which could serve as a model for a state-wide curriculum. After discussing enrollment trends and causes for the lack of articulation in foreign language instruction at all levels, the author suggests how a fully integrated program could be implemented through the state foreign language association. Specifically discussed areas which bear directly on articulation include: (1) objectives of the foreign language program, (2) methodology, (3) teaching, (4) coordination of long-range materials, and (5) administration--student and teacher placement. Commentary on the development of a state-wide curriculum based on behavioral objectives concludes the article. (RL)

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Articulation and the State Foreign Language Association

by

David J. Woloshin

Delivered to the Nevada Foreign Language Teachers Association

Spring Conference, Las Vegas, April 19, 1969

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Six years ago, when I decided on FL articulation as my dissertation problem, one of the chief factors which influenced that decision was the fact that it was a wide-open field - a field virtually without experts. (In such a field, even the newcomer is an expert.) So I thought. Actually, I soon learned that every student who had had more than one FL teacher considered himself an expert in FL articulation. To a very limited extent, he was correct, for he "knew" that the reason he got a C from teacher #2 was because teacher #1 didn't insist on his memorizing verb conjugations, while teacher #2 based 50% of the grade on that particular aspect of his course. A search of the literature at that time yielded only a few lines on articulation in an occasional text on language teaching. As recently as a year and 1/2 ago, when I reported my findings to the AFLA, I felt justified in spinning out an extended metaphor comparing FL articulation to the weather, saying, in effect, that hardly anyone was talking about it, and certainly nobody was doing anything about it.

Now I stand before you as an "expert", perhaps even a "pioneer" in a field which although still not cluttered, has in the past year or so been among the topics of a major national symposium and a national professional meeting and has attracted the attention and labors of some highly capable language teachers, including yourselves.

I hope all this activity does not come too late. During the past year, when at least some students have become vocal in

challenging the relevancy of academic requirements, it is not strange that FL requirements should have come into question. The Ph.D. FL requirement has been significantly altered or even eliminated completely on some campuses and in some fields. Unless we in the profession can demonstrate the relevance and importance of our teaching field to the satisfaction at least of those who are being challenged (the University administrations), we may find the FL requirements for the Bachelor's degree likewise altered and perhaps even eliminated. Entrance requirements will follow, and then the FL explosion of the past 12 years will turn into a mild fizzle. I, for one, prefer to go out, if go I must, with a bang, rather than a whimper. If the present trends of student activism and teacher apathy continue for much longer, many of us may be looking for work.

What does this have to do with articulation? Simply that a profession which is aware of its importance and is proud of what it is doing and can do for its society does not permit itself to fragment to the point where it can no longer effectively make its contribution. And I submit that we FL teachers have allowed our programs to become fragmented.

Perhaps the main source of our problem has been growth. Perhaps our enrollments have grown so rapidly within the past decade or so that we have been forced to pay too much attention to quantity and not enough to quality.

In his excellent statistical study of FL enrollments, Glen Willbern

points out that in 1960, there were 2.8 million students between grades 7-12 who were enrolled in FL courses in the U.S. In 1965, there were 4.5 million students enrolled in FL courses in the public secondary schools. In your own State, for example, the growth was even more startling during the 5 year period reported on by Dr. Willbern - from 4,156 in 1960 to 11,451 in 1965. Or to put it into better perspective, while the Nevada public secondary school enrollment was growing by 80.8%, the FL enrollment in those schools grew by 175.5%; that's 35% per year and represents the fastest rate of growth in the country. However, I did not come here to dazzle or flatter you with statistics. I did come to try to investigate with you the problems of communication and articulation in FL study.

Let us then simply assume that at least one cause of our ills is the tremendously rapid growth in FL enrollments. Let us also simply agree that now that the growth has tapered off and before it goes into an irreversible decline, it is time we devoted our close attention to the quality of our programs. Also let us hope that the discussions which take place today will ultimately flow into action. To further that end, I propose to conclude my remarks today by making several suggestions aimed at solving some of the many problems of articulation of FL study.

Let us begin by seeing if we can't isolate those problems. In considering articulation, one is almost immediately struck by the complexity of the situation. Articulation involves every language

commonly studied, every level and every phase of language teaching, all the way from the training of the prospective teacher through the function of the individual teacher as a member of a professional group, and including student motivation, communication between teachers, objectives, methodology, placement, etc.

To aid us in isolating the various problems, let us take a look at what could happen to a good FL student in a totally unarticulated system (as most systems are, at present). Such a student frequently is the victim of what might be called the two-year recycling syndrome.

This particular disease is very common on the high school and college levels and manifests itself in the following manner: The student begins his language study as a high school freshman and for one of a number of reasons (loss of interest, time or scheduling problems, poor teaching, etc.) takes just 2 years of that language; he takes a 2-year vacation from language study and then, when he enters college and learns he needs 2 years of language for his degree, he decides he might as well go back to the beginning - he recycles. Thus in 6 years the student has been exposed to 4 years of FL study, but has actually learned 2 years worth of the FL, if that. I suspect that something similar may happen to the student who goes from Jr. High School to high school without even experiencing the FL gap. With poor articulation, recycling could take place at this level also. And then we are confronted by a student who has

been exposed to 6 years of FL study, but only actually learned the language for two years. I submit that each time a student recycles, we, his FL teachers, have failed him. When a student recycles twice, we have failed him, ourselves, and our profession - and we have failed miserably. I, for one, don't like to fail, and I also don't like the educational waste that is obvious and rife in a poorly articulated language program.

Let's take a closer look at our hypothetical unarticulated program and see if we can determine the causes of our failure and of all this needless educational waste.

One of the major causes, as I see it, is the lack of communication between FL teachers.

The existence of a communications gap among FL teachers (experts in communications) is unforgiveable. The very fact that we teach means we <u>should</u> be experts in the realm of conveying and disseminating information. But to teach in the area of language (by far the most important and most frequent means of communication) and yet be willing to put up with a lack of communication within one's very profession is a sin against the muse of honesty - a kind of professional hypocrisy which no decent, thinking teacher should tolerate. Certainly, one of the most important facets involved in the ideal of the educated man - a facet which FL study should promote, is openness to the ideas and feelings of our fellows. If we FL teachers have lost this openness, this willingness, even eagerness to know

what others are thinking and how they feel, then perhaps we have already lost the battle. For how can we educate others, if we ourselves abjure one of the most important goals of education.

Obviously, I am not suggesting that getting together and talking will make all our problems disappear, but what I am trying to say is, without dialogue, there can be no mutual understanding and no appreciation of each other's problems and ideas, and without this appreciation there can be no basis for intelligent action. Unless I have completely misconstrued the purpose of this meeting, we are here to engage in meaningful dialogue (if you'll excuse the cliché), i.e. discussions which will lead to action.

For dialogues to achieve that nebulous and illusive plane of meaningfulness, we should know specifically what it is we need to discuss. Here are some suggestions:

A. Objectives of the FL program. Is there an overall objective or system of objectives, all teachers at all levels can agree upon, be proud of and defend before all challengers? Are utilitarian objectives enough? Can we continue to say we teach the four skills of speaking, understanding, reading and writing? How do we answer the challenge when students ask why? To the majority of students, these FL skills seem pointless, since they'll never have the chance to use them - even if they were given the chance to master them thoroughly. If we once manage to find overall objectives we can all agree to, the next step is to define learning levels according

to classroom, or short-range objectives. What can or should we expect of a student at a given level - or after a certain amount of exposure to the language? These short-range objectives need to be stated in behavioral terms.

B. Disagreement on methodology is another prime cause of non-articulation. (The student expert in introductory remarks was victimized by this problem.) If we can ever agree on objectives, this problem will tend to solve itself, for once we know precisely what we want to do, and learn how to frame our objectives, the methodology dispute should vanish. I shall try to demonstrate this a bit later.

C. The third major cause of poor articulation is poor teaching. State certification laws sometimes responsible - perhaps it is too easy to become a FL teacher - the language minor - or the native speaker totally untrained as a language teacher. The training and certification of FL teachers should be an item of major concern in discussions of articulation of FL study.

D. Lack of co-ordinated long-range materials also contributes to problems of articulation. ALM for secondary schools is a beginning, but only a beginning. What about the child who changes school levels in the middle of his FL career? Where are the programs that are designed to carry over from the secondary to the college level, or from FLES to secondary? Why should graduation mean the end of one set of materials and the beginning of another? Has a child

undergone some kind of magic transition between the end of High School and the beginning of College? Has the summer of his 18th or 19th year suddenly changed him into a totally different species? Are there absolutely no materials which could serve more than one school level? Perhaps our thinking, or the thinking of text-book publishers has been too restricted. More talk about materials could be useful and certainly is appropriate when discussing articulation.

E. The final group of problems in this by no means exhaustive list falls under the heading of administration. Chief among this group is the problem of student placement. What happens to a student when he graduates from high school and enters college? How is he placed in the FL sequence of the college?

Some methods in use:

1. Let the student decide
2. Placement tests
3. Interview with FL teacher
4. Automatic placement according to number of years studied FL in high school on questionable basis of one year high school equals one semester of college.

Another administrative problem is teacher placement. The high school teacher who teaches three periods of German and two of social studies could just as well be teaching two periods of German in Jr. High School and three in High School. Certification might be a problem. But why not be certified to teach a FL at any level rather

than two or three subjects at one level?

Problem of gap. We should be discussing the student with two years vacation from FL study in his Jr. and Sr. High School years. How can he be helped so that it isn't necessary for him to repeat those first two years of FL when he gets into college?

Those then are some of the major problems in the area of articulation. What is to be done about them? Some of them may be impossible of solution, others merely difficult. But there may be some which are like half-open doors - if we will but lean against them, they will swing wide. We won't know which are which, if we don't start working. Initial step is probably to set up an ideal. Something to shoot for. The ideal FL program, from standpoint of articulation probably looks something like this:

It is a program which begins in the lower grades and continues into college; it permits continuous progress in mastery of FL skills, personal culture, international understanding and whatever other overall objectives it is designed to fill. It should be flexible enough to provide for the beginner at any point and still permit him to continue to develop his FL skills to the limits of his interest and/or abilities. The program must be co-ordinated so well that changing schools involves no more than a normal period of adjustment. In such a program, no student should ever have to repeat any part of his language study. His study should be continuous - i.e. the program should offer him an unbroken sequence of at least four years of language study.

I remind you this is the ideal situation. We may never attain it, but I feel that we should strive toward it.

Attempts to implement an articulated program of FL study might well proceed through the State FL Association. I am suggesting that the State FL Association act as a focus of activity directed toward sound, articulated language programs. Even beyond that, I would like to suggest that this FL Association, the Nevada FL Teachers' Association, set itself up as a model after which other State Organizations can pattern their articulation activities. More than a suggestion - ISSUE this as a challenge: My reasons for making this challenge to you are as follows:

1. Two communities in the State which should be of right size for articulation experiments - large enough to offer solid, continuous programs of at least four years in two or three languages, but not so large as to be unmanageable or cumbersome.
2. You have an active, interested group which contains representatives from all the teaching levels.
3. It is obvious that you are aware of and concerned by the problems of articulation.

If you should indeed be willing to accept my challenge, let me offer you a plan of action.

State Organization should set up articulation committees in each of State's major communities. One in Las Vegas - one in Reno. Competition angle.

Each committee should be divided by FLs to be articulated in the community. E.g. if Las Vegas wishes to concentrate its efforts on French, German and Spanish - then French, German and Spanish subcommittees should be established in Las Vegas - each working within its own language but maintaining contact with all others. Lines of communication must remain open always. If State chapters of AATs are active and interested in problem, they too should be involved in work of committee. To be sure, every attempt should be made to involve the FL leadership in the work of the articulation committees. That FL leadership consists of State and local co-ordinators, Department chairmen at University and high school levels, officers of State FL organizations and State chapters of the AATs, anyone who has shown an abiding interest, willingness to work, a modicum of success. Certainly each subcommittee should contain at least one representative from each level involved, e.g. Spanish subcommittee for Las Vegas should have on it a FLES teacher as well as teachers from Jr. High School, High School and University levels.

Now that we have our committees and subcommittees all set up, what is there for them to do? I would suggest that each subcommittee start by setting itself some long-range and some short-range goals.

Let's examine the short-range goals first:

a. Closing the communications gap. How to provide more opportunities for FL teachers to talk to each other? Suggest - frequent open meetings of articulation committees - to which all interested

parties are invited. The State organization could have other working committees, regional meetings on a monthly basis. Newsletter with open format - permitting anyone to air gripes or share ideas.

b. Student placement - can frequently be taken care of over the short-range. Find out how students at local Universities are placed in FL program. Are objective testing methods used, or can a student do pretty much as he pleases? Situation at University of Arizona and its remedy. Recommend use of MLA co-op tests as most reliable placement devices available. Where possible, these tests should be given at the end of the last high school language course - grades then can be sent on to the University FL department for evaluation. The sub-committees concerned should initiate communication with the authorities responsible for FL placement, pointing out any injustices which may exist and recommending a better method of placement. This is where it helps to have University Department Heads involved in your committees.

c. Teacher placement: Committee should investigate the potential for changing the certification laws so that a FL teacher may be allowed to teach on more than one level. The potential for better articulation offered by this one rather simple step is enormous.

d. The problem of the 2-year high school gap in language study can be attacked through jr. high school and high school counselors. The articulation committees should approach the counselors in their respective districts and offer them some advice about FL study: e.g. where only 2 years of a FL are offered, students should be

advised to begin the study of that language as juniors; when a college-bound student begins the study of a FL in his freshman year, he should be encouraged, in every way possible, to take 4 years of that language in high school. A strong inducement which is often overlooked is the fact that very often he may fulfill the college FL requirement while still in high school.

Gap problem can also be remedied at college level. University of Arizona has instituted intensive remedial language courses at level of third semester of FL study, specifically to help freshmen who have been away from the language for a year or two. The committees could encourage adoption of a similar system at the University of Nevada.

The long-range goals of the articulation committees could be stated as follows: To discover for each FL a system of objectives acceptable to all teachers of that language.

Suggest beginning with overall objectives. These are crucial, since, in order for our program to achieve a high degree of success, each teacher within the program must be absolutely dedicated to the fulfillment of the overall objectives. We must decide, then, what the main function or functions of FL study should be - the choices are many and varied:

1. to develop intellectual powers
2. to increase the students' personal culture through an acquaintance with the world's literature

3. to promote international understanding and interpersonal communications
4. to broaden the students' cultural and human base by enabling them to react to situations from within the framework of another language and culture
5. to teach the student something about the importance of language as a cultural force

Perhaps your committees will decide that all of these are worthy of adoption or that a combination of two or three of them is appropriate. Whatever decision is arrived at, with regard to overall objectives, it is highly important that all teachers concerned be dedicated to accomplishing the stated objectives, and that they be stated in such a way as to be a constant source of pride and inspiration to all FL teachers. We should not be afraid of tooting our own horns or appearing gushy or sentimental. We have something of great importance to offer the world; all we need is to become convinced of it.

Once we have settled on overall objectives, framed them in proud language and voiced them abroad in the land, then we can get down to the business of classroom objectives and how and when to try to fulfill them. I can safely predict that these matters will be time-consuming and difficult. In this area, I can only suggest some general guide-lines, since classroom objectives should emerge directly from whatever overall objectives are decided on. Actually that is

the most important guide-line I can offer you: There must be a logical connection between the two levels of objectives. Ideally, the objectives you teach for in the classroom should lead directly toward your overall objectives. Classroom objectives should be stated in behavioral terms. This is not as simple as it may seem. We must first get out of the habit of stating our objectives in terms of what the teacher does. We must state objectives in terms first of all of what we expect the student to do by any given stage in his FL study; secondly - in terms of what limitations and conditions may reasonably be imposed on his performance and thirdly - in terms of methods of recognition of success or failure. Thus, it is simply not enough to say that one of our classroom objectives is listening, or aural comprehension; we must state what is to be listened to, when in the sequence, under what conditions, and how we are to determine whether or not the performance is acceptable. Such a behavioral objective might be phrased as follows:

By the end of the second level of the study of German, the student should be able to listen to a 10 minute conversation on a topic of general, every day interest, including vocabulary and structure of common occurence, spoken by native speakers, at normal speed, the student being permitted to take notes. He should be able to answer orally or in writing with a minimum of hesitation and with reasonably accurate pronunciation and structure, 8 out of 10 factual questions dealing with the content and circumstances of the conversation.

Thus our objective includes student behavior at a given stage in his learning of the language; the conditions, and the criteria by which successful performance is recognized. To do this for every objective at every level of language study is a long and arduous and very difficult task; but I submit that unless and until we do, we have no articulation and we really have no language program. What we do have is a hodge-podge - a mess where everybody involved is, at least to some extent, wasting his own and his students' time and effort.

The final long-range goal I want to mention is that of improving teacher competence. The training and education of FL teachers is a special area requiring the development of special skills. It is not enough to expose a prospective teacher to 24-30 units of courses in language and literature, a few shot-gun courses in Education and a semester of practice teaching. The committees should seek to involve those responsible for training language teachers (the University Departments of FLs, especially) in a thoroughgoing re-evaluation of their programs. The committees should see to it that University FL Department Heads are aware of the MLA's Guidelines for Teacher Education Programs in Modern Foreign Languages. This is a concise, two page statement which appeared in PMLA in May 1966 (reprints are available from MLA Materials Center) and which has proved of tremendous value at the University of Arizona in the restructuring of our FL teacher education program.

Finally, I would call to your attention the fact that the AATG

has been working on the articulation problem in German for a year or so and at present is sponsoring a group which is attempting to develop a national model curriculum. My suggestions to you are considerably more modest - a local curriculum which could serve as a model for other localities and perhaps eventually be developed into a state-wide curriculum, however, it would be unwise to ignore the efforts of any other group. Therefore, I strongly recommend that your committees remain aware of the articulation activities of AATG and any other group working on the problem.

In closing, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to spread the gospel of higher quality language programs and professional unity, and I want to add the very sincere hope that some day, perhaps in three, four or five years, you will invite me back so that I may see what a really well-integrated, carefully articulated FL program is like.